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FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2170

INFO CIA WASHDC
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AMEMBASSY BOGOTA
AMEMBASSY QUITO
AMEMBASSY LIMA
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E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/28/08
TAGS: PGOV, PREL, ECON, EFIN, VE
SUBJECT: POLLING THE POLLSTERS: CONSULTORES 21 (REPORT 2 OF 9)

REF: CARACAS 3287

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1.5(D)

SUMMARY AND INTRODUCTION: CONSULTORES 21

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF STATE n/a
REVIEW AUTHORITY: OSCAR J OLSON CONFIDENTIAL
CLASSIFICATION: CONFIDENTIAL REASON: 1.4(D)
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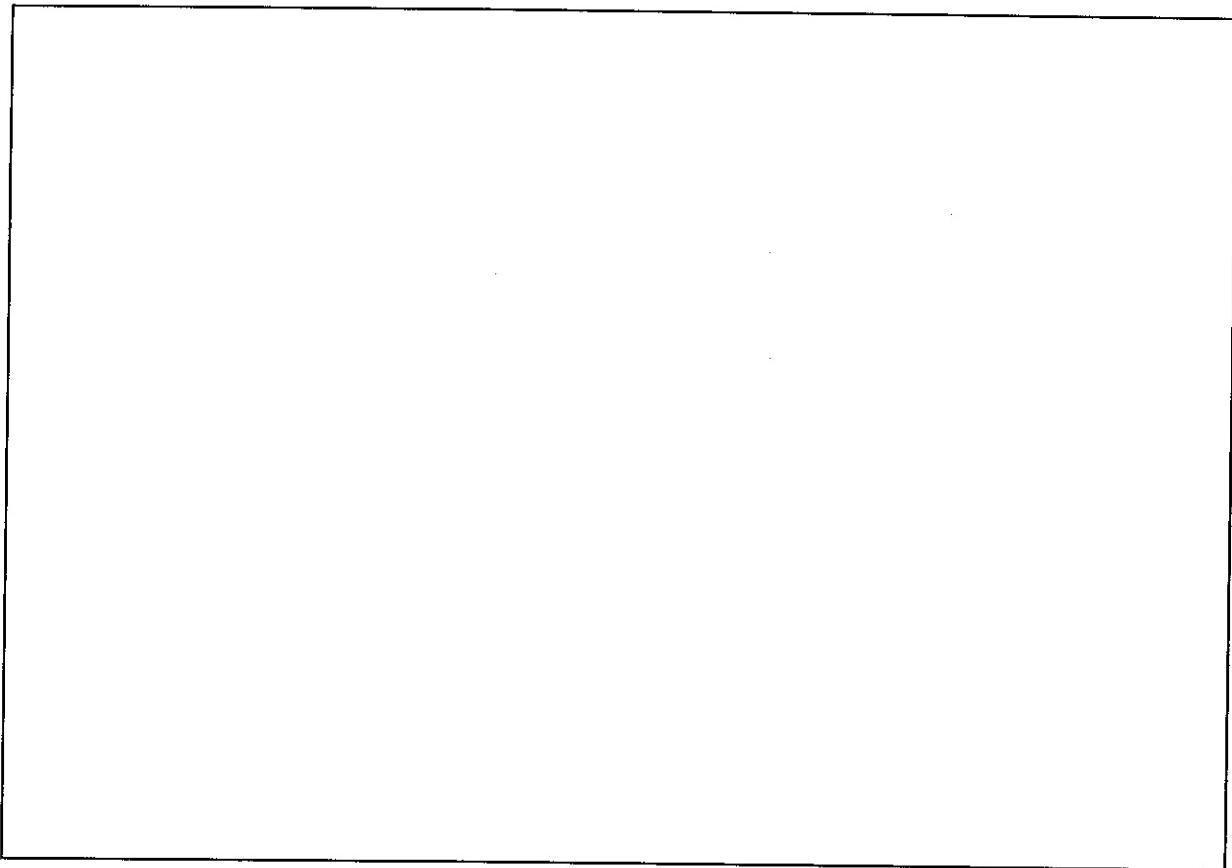
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METHODOLOGY: SPOTTY RECORD

3. (U) FOUNDED IN 1984, CONSULTORES 21 HAS 30 PERMANENT EMPLOYEES, HIRING INTERVIEWERS ON A TEMPORARY BASIS FROM AN AVAILABLE POOL OF CENSUS TAKERS. IT DOES WEEKLY POLLING FOR PRIVATE CLIENTS, THE RESULTS OF WHICH ARE OFTEN LEAKED TO THE PRESS. ITS SAMPLE IS TAKEN FROM URBAN VENEZUELA (POPULATION CENTERS OVER 20,000). THE NORMAL SAMPLE SIZE IS 1500 RESPONDENTS. CONSULTORES 21 CONDUCTS FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS IN THE HOME. IT QUOTES A MARGIN OF ERROR OF PLUS OR MINUS 2.6 PERCENTAGE POINTS, BUT ITS USE OF QUOTAS MEANS THAT A STATISTICAL MARGIN OF ERROR CANNOT BE CALCULATED. CONSULTORES 21 DRAWS ITS SAMPLE BASED ON PROJECTIONS FROM THE 1990 CENSUS, AND USES THE CENSUS SEGMENTS AS SAMPLE POINTS. THE MAXIMUM NUMBER OF INTERVIEWS PER SAMPLE POINT IS 10, ALTHOUGH CONSULTORES 21 INTERVIEWERS OFTEN SEEM TO LIMIT IT TO 7 OR 8. THE SAMPLE IS MULTI-STAGE AND RANDOMIZED UNTIL THE RESPONDENT SELECTION STAGE, WHERE QUOTAS ARE USED FOR AGE AND GENDER. [REDACTED] SPONSORING REGULAR POLLS IN MAJOR CITIES USING A SAMPLE SIZE OF 1000 RESPONDENTS AS A MEANS OF TESTING AND REFINING HIS ANTI-CHAVEZ MEDIA CAMPAIGN. CONSULTORES 21 POLLS PROVED FAIRLY ACCURATE IN THE 1993 ELECTION, BUT FAILED TO PREDICT THE 1988 ELECTION. SEVERAL OTHER POLLSTERS ASSERTED THAT

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CONSULTORES 21 CHANGED ITS NAME BEFORE THE 1993 ELECTION TO AVOID
HAVING ITS ELECTION POLLS QUESTIONED DUE TO ITS 1988 FAILURE.

4. (U) THE GOOD THINGS ABOUT CONSULTORES 21 METHODOLOGY:

-- IT USES A REASONABLE SAMPLE SIZE AND AT LEAST 150 SAMPLE POINTS
IN ITS TYPICAL SAMPLE (WHICH GIVES THEIR POLLS AN ENHANCED DEGREE
OF ACCURACY.) AT LEAST UNTIL THE RESPONDENT SELECTION STAGE, IT
DOES A RANDOMIZED, MULTI-STAGE PROBABILITY SAMPLE BASED ON THE BEST
CENSUS PROJECTIONS.

-- A HIGH PERCENTAGE (40) OF INTERVIEWS ARE SUPERVISED, INCREASING
THE CONFIDENCE LEVEL IN THE RESULTS.

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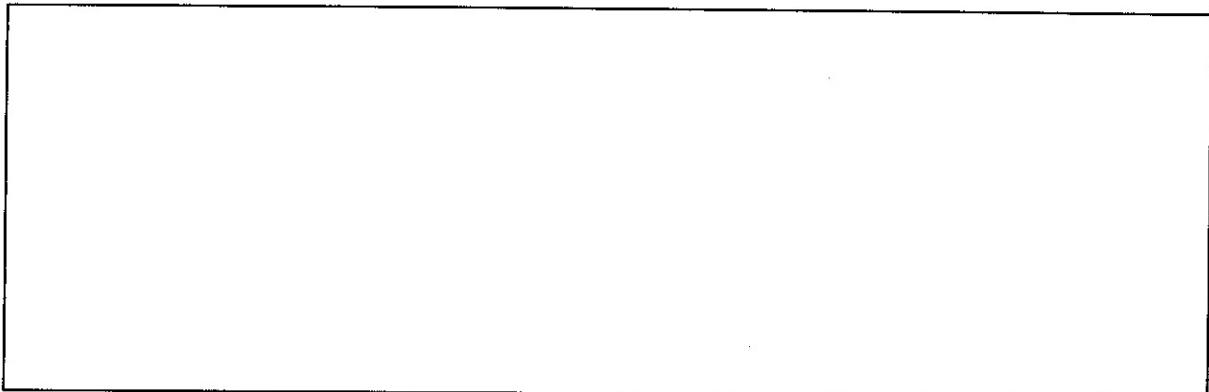
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7. (U) CONSULTORES 21 IS DOING A LOT OF WORK FOR COPEI, BUT IN OUR MEETING WITH [REDACTED] SEEMED MORE OBJECTIVE THAN [REDACTED] POINTED OUT THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF SALAS' AND CHAVEZ' CAMPAIGNS, WHAT IT WOULD TAKE FOR SALAS TO WIN, AND WHAT IT WOULD TAKE FOR CHAVEZ TO LOSE. [REDACTED] DID NOT TRY TO PLAY DOWN SALAS' CONTINUING RISE IN THE POLLS.

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[REDACTED] DRAWING A BEAD ON CHAVEZ

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8. (U) [REDACTED] BASED HIS ANALYSIS ON CONSULTORES 21'S SEPTEMBER 18-28 POLL. THROUGH CLUSTER AND FACTOR ANALYSIS, [REDACTED] SEES THE ELECTORATE AS LARGEMLY IN AGREEMENT ON THE NEED FOR SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE, BUT DIVIDED ON THE MEANS TO THAT END. THE VAST MAJORITY-- 92 PERCENT--THINK VENEZUELA IS A RICH COUNTRY, BUT 73 PERCENT SAY THEY ARE NOT BENEFITING FROM THE COUNTRY'S RICHES. THEY

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PRINCIPALLY BLAME CORRUPTION AND THE POLITICAL SYSTEM AS BEING THE CAUSE OF THEIR OWN ECONOMIC MISFORTUNE. THIS DRIVES THE ELECTORATE TO SUPPORT A MAJOR CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. ABOUT 42 PERCENT OF THE ELECTORATE IS FOCUSED ON WHAT HE CALLS "REDISTRIBUTION" ISSUES SUCH AS JOB CREATION, HEALTH CARE, AND EDUCATION. ABOUT 57 PERCENT IS FOCUSED ON "PUNISHMENT" ISSUES, SUCH AS CRACKING DOWN ON CORRUPTION AND CRIME.

9. (U) [REDACTED] ARGUES THAT ALL VENEZUELANS HAVE "REDISTRIBUTION" ISSUES AS THEIR PRIMARY OBJECTIVE. THE "PUNISHMENT" SEGMENT SEES CONTROLLING CORRUPTION AND CRIME AS THE ONLY MEANS OF ACHIEVING THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC GOALS THEY ARE REALLY SEEKING. THE ELECTORATE SEES CHAVEZ AS STRONGER ON THE PUNISHMENT ISSUES AND SALAS AS STRONGER ON THE REDISTRIBUTION ISSUES. [REDACTED] BELIEVES THAT IN ORDER FOR SALAS TO WIN, HE NEEDS TO DISTANCE HIMSELF FROM THE TRADITIONAL ESTABLISHMENT BY PORTRAYING HIMSELF AS A CANDIDATE ABLE TO MEET THE PUNISHMENT GOALS. AT THE SAME TIME, CHAVEZ NEEDS TO BE PORTRAYED AS MORE RADICAL AND LESS LIKELY TO MEET THE REDISTRIBUTION GOALS.

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BASED ON THEIR POLLING RESULTS, [REDACTED] THAT
ABOUT 40-45 PERCENT OF CHAVEZ'S SUPPORTERS ARE "SOFT." THEY THINK
THESE SOFT SUPPORTERS COULD BE BROUGHT OVER TO THE SALAS CAMP WITH
THE RIGHT STRATEGY SINCE THEY ARE SUPPORTING CHAVEZ ONLY BECAUSE NO

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OTHER CANDIDATE HAS DEMONSTRATED THE ABILITY TO BRING THE KIND OF SUBSTANTIAL CHANGE THAT THEY WANT. THEY DO NOT SUPPORT THE DISSOLUTION OF CONGRESS AND WOULD BE CONCERNED IF CHAVEZ'S ACTIONS RESULT IN A LOSS OF INVESTMENT FROM ABROAD. 62 PERCENT OF PEOPLE INTERVIEWED HAVE NO IDEA WHAT THE PURPOSE OF THE "CONSTITUYENTE" OR CONSTITUTIONAL ASSEMBLY IS, INCLUDING A MAJORITY OF CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS. 55 TO 60 PERCENT OF CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS ARE HARD CORE ADHERENTS, AND ARE NOT SUSCEPTIBLE TO SALAS' CAMPAIGNING.

10. (U) IN FOCUS GROUPS, FEMALE CHAVEZ SUPPORTERS SEEM MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO CHANGING THEIR VOTE TO SALAS THROUGH ADS THAT EMPHASIZE THE POTENTIAL FOR POLITICAL VIOLENCE IF CHAVEZ WINS. MEN ARE MOST LIKELY TO SWITCH DUE TO ADS THAT EMPHASIZE THE POTENTIAL LOSS OF EMPLOYMENT RESULTING FROM A DROP IN FOREIGN INVESTMENT.

[REDACTED] THOUGHT THAT MANY OF THESE SOFT VOTES WOULD HARDEN AS THE ELECTION DRAWS CLOSER, IF SALAS DOES NOT MAKE A CONCERTED EFFORT TO GAIN THESE VOTES. [REDACTED] DOES NOT HOLD OUT MUCH HOPE THAT THERE WILL BE A UNITED ANTI-CHAVEZ FRONT TO SUPPORT SALAS, AS THE ANTI-CHAVEZ CAMP IS TOO DIVIDED.

BUT HE IS STILL A PESSIMIST

11. (U) [REDACTED] THOUGHT AD WOULD WIN A MAJORITY OF THE
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GOVERNORSHIPS AND THAT CHAVEZ'S PARTIES (MVR, PPT, MAS) WOULD WIN A PLURALITY IN THE CONGRESS, INCLUDING A MAJORITY IN THE SENATE. (THESE RESULTS HAVE TO BE TAKEN WITH A HEALTHY DOSE OF SKEPTICISM AS [REDACTED] HAS NOT DONE THE INDIVIDUAL STATEWIDE POLLS NECESSARY TO MAKE SUCH A PREDICTION.) UNLESS SALAS RADICALIZES HIS MESSAGE, [REDACTED] THINKS CHAVEZ WILL WIN THE PRESIDENCY. IN HIS OWN POLLS, HE ACKNOWLEDGED THAT SALAS WAS ONLY 10 POINTS BEHIND CHAVEZ, BUT HE ATTRIBUTED THIS TO THE FACT THAT HE PLACED HIS VOTE INTENTION QUESTION AT THE END OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE, IN ORDER TO TEST THE EFFECTIVENESS OF HIS ANTI-CHAVEZ MEDIA CAMPAIGN, AND WAS THEREFORE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE VOTE INTENTION OF THE POPULATION. HE DID ACKNOWLEDGE THAT SALAS WAS GAINING IN THE POLLS, BUT FELT THAT HE HAD A CEILING OF 32 PERCENT OF THE VOTE BECAUSE THE RADICAL VOTE WAS GOING COMPLETELY TO CHAVEZ AND SALAS WAS DIVIDING THE MODERATE VOTE WITH SEVERAL OTHER CANDIDATES. HE THOUGHT THAT SALAS WAS GAINING NOT SO MUCH BECAUSE OF HIS CAMPAIGN, BUT BECAUSE IRENE WAS NO LONGER A VIABLE OPTION FOR THE ANTI-CHAVEZ FRONT. ALSO, SINCE ALFARO IS ALSO NOT SEEN AS A VIABLE OPTION, AD'S ANTI-CHAVEZ MEDIA CAMPAIGN WAS ACTUALLY BENEFITING SALAS, NOT AD. [REDACTED] EXPECTS A HIGH TURNOUT, 80-88 PERCENT OF VOTERS IN DECEMBER, LESS IN NOVEMBER.

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LAYING OUT THE POSSIBILITIES

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12. (U) [REDACTED] GAVE MUCH THE SAME ANALYSIS OF THE VENEZUELAN POLITICAL SITUATION AS DID KELLER. THE MAIN DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE TWO ANALYSES IS THAT [REDACTED] BASED ON MORE RECENT POLL DATA, ARGUED THAT SALAS HAD RECENTLY RISEN IN THE POLLS TO WITHIN 12 POINTS OF CHAVEZ--43 PERCENT TO 31 PERCENT OF LIKELY CONFIDENTIAL

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VOTERS. THIS MADE [REDACTED] MUCH MORE OPEN TO THE IDEA THAT SALAS WOULD EVENTUALLY OVERTAKE CHAVEZ. [REDACTED] BASED ON THE SEPTEMBER POLL, ARGUED THAT CHAVEZ HAD A MORE SIZEABLE LEAD (45 PERCENT FOR CHAVEZ AND 26 PERCENT FOR SALAS), AND DID NOT APPEAR TOO CONFIDENT THAT SALAS WOULD OVERCOME THE DIFFERENCE.

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[REDACTED] THOUGHT THE CONGRESSIONAL AND GUBERNATORIAL ELECTIONS WOULD GO TO THE TRADITIONAL PARTIES, ALTHOUGH HE ADMITTED HE HAD NOT DONE THE STATE BY STATE POLLS NECESSARY TO MAKE AN ACCURATE PREDICTION. BASED ON POLLS THAT INCLUDED THE RURAL AREAS,

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[REDACTED] THOUGHT THAT THE AD CANDIDATE, ALFARO, WAS A BIT STRONGER IN THE RURAL AREAS THAN IN THE REST OF THE COUNTRY. HE HAD NOT FOUND ANY SIGNIFICANT DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE RELATIVE URBAN AND RURAL SUPPORT FOR CHAVEZ AND SALAS. IN ORDER TO WIN, HE FELT SALAS HAD TO ACTIVELY CAMPAIGN TO GET CHAVEZ'S SOFT VOTE. CHAVEZ, ON THE OTHER HAND, HAD TO APPEAR THAT HE WAS NOT ON THE DEFENSIVE AND WAS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY, AND HAD TO AVOID FURTHER DEFINING HIMSELF. CHAVEZ HAD TO FOCUS ON KEEPING VOTERS, WHILE SALAS HAD TO FOCUS ON GAINING THEM.

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GREAT EXPECTATIONS

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13. (U) OF CONCERN, IN THE SEPTEMBER POLL, 65 PERCENT OF URBAN VENEZUELAN EXPECTED SIGNIFICANT RESULTS FROM WHOEVER WINS THE PRESIDENCY WITHIN THE FIRST YEAR IN OFFICE. 48 PERCENT SAID THEY WOULD GO TO THE STREETS IF CAMPAIGN PROMISES WERE NOT MET, NEARLY HALF OF WHICH SAY THEY ARE WILLING TO DO SO EVEN IF THE MILITARY CRACKS DOWN ON THE PROTESTS. 26 PERCENT ACCEPT THE USE OF VIOLENCE TO ACHIEVE THE GOALS OF CHANGE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM. IF PROTESTS BREAK OUT, [REDACTED] THOUGHT THE VENEZUELAN MEDIA WOULD PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE IN EITHER INCITING OR CALMING THE MASSES. HE FELT THE MEDIA PLAYED AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN INFLAMING THE RIOTS IN 1989, AND HIS POLLING REVEALED THAT THE MEDIA WAS THE VENEZUELAN INSTITUTION THAT THE PEOPLE HAD THE MOST TRUST IN.

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CONCLUSION

[REDACTED]

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